



# Marketing Your Lunch: Bringing Kids to the Table

**M**arketing is used to sell kids everything from shoes to soda. So why shouldn't it be used to sell healthy, local foods, too? When you buy foods locally, label them on the lunch line so kids can see the farms that grow their food. Some products may even be from a student's family farm! Promoting and marketing local food at school works best if it is a schoolwide effort reinforced by teachers, administration, parents, and food service staff.

## Promoting Local Foods to the School and Community

Serving fresh, local foods can attract students and staff to your program. Advertise these efforts to increase the number of students, teachers, and staff that purchase meals. Offer a "free school lunch" coupon to staff for the first week of school, or make teachers a weekly quiche or sandwich wrap and baby green salad as a special lunch option. (Free lunches cannot be offered using federal school food service program funds, however.)

## Getting the Word Out!

When marketing your local lunch program, keep in mind that the best way to publicize your work is through word of mouth. Students, parents, and teachers can help build support when you let them in on your plans, so reach out to all these groups via school newsletters, announcements, teachers, and signs on the lunch line.

- Invite high school newspapers to cover the story of your local purchasing.
- Invite reporters from community newspapers to cover the story as well. Also, when you're publicizing your changes, it's helpful to think about the messages you want to relay to the media, parents, students, and teachers about the program.
- Hold harvest dinners for the community and invite media to see your program changes. Invite

### Marketing Ideas:

- Place an erasable board next to the lunch line to advertise what's for lunch and what is local.
- Ask the farmers you work with to provide their logo for the lunch line. One Vermont farmer brought in her farm-grown flowers at the start of the school year and placed a sign next to it: "Welcome back to school – from our farm."
- Ask teachers to talk to their students about what's for lunch and where the food comes from.
- Advertise and market the changes you make on your menu – no matter how small that change is.
- Publish new menus and regular kitchen happenings in school newsletters.



the farmers with whom you work to come promote the program and answer questions about their products.

- Make sure you continue to communicate information about your lunch program after changes are in place.
- Launch a quarterly school food newspaper with teachers and students. Students can produce the articles so that the school and community can learn more about your lunch program.
- Highlight the annual National School Lunch Week by serving local foods and/or trying new recipes.

The idea of improving children’s nutrition and supporting local farms is easy to “sell” as a local media story. News outlets like covering “feel good” stories and school food is one. If you contact them, chances are they’ll at least follow up and print information. Contacting local media can go a long way when trying to bring the community in to your program. The more positive media coverage a project receives, the more support it will generate from the school administration, school board, parents, teachers, food service staff, and local community. By collaborating with teachers, administrators, farmers and community members, different aspects of your work can be supported and developed by the appropriate individual and organization.

## How to Contact the Media

- To begin building relationships to help you publicize your school, call your local newspapers and radio or TV stations and ask for a reporter who covers health, education, or agriculture. Tell the reporter who you are and what the school lunch program is trying to accomplish.
- Keep in touch with your contacts. Tell them of newsworthy items about your lunch program.
- Fax or email a press release to your contacts when you hold a local food event.
- Follow-up by phone whenever you send a release. Simply ask the reporter if he/she received the release and plans to cover the event.

When contacting the media, be sure to follow up with phone calls. Even if you sent them several notices or invitations, call them the day before events to remind them to attend. Keep all newspaper clippings and articles relating to your school; you can use them later to show your school’s relevance in the community. Invite the media for events large and small. Inviting the mayor for a local lunch? Make a press release! Taste testing locally sourced zucchini muffins? Invite the newspaper! It is important that your community knows about the fun and important things happening in your school’s cafeteria. Be creative! For example, send a local apple along with your press release.

On the following pages are sample press releases to reference when advertising a community event.

*Adapted from The Food Trust, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Used with permission.*

# Name of Your School Here

## N E W S R E L E A S E

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Insert Date Here

Contact: Your Name Here

Your Phone Number

### **NAME OF EVENT HERE**

**Your Town, VT** - On February 19, about [number and grade of students] students from [name of your school] in [name of your town] will participate in a taste test sponsored by the [school or district] food service department and [anyone else involved]. The students will be offered samples of [type of dish] and [type of dish] that will be prepared by [grade level] students and Food Service staff. [Grade level] students will also conduct surveys with participants to determine whether or not the new food should be incorporated into the school's lunch menu.

Results will then be tabulated by [whoever will do the tabulating]. Events like this one have been occurring [how often] for [how long] at [your school] with great results. Since the beginning of the taste test program [these food items] have been incorporated into the school lunch menu, with a particular emphasis on locally grown, healthy food choices.

**YOUR SCHOOL'S ADDRESS HERE**

# Name of Your School Here

## N E W S R E L E A S E

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Insert Date Here

Contact: Your Name Here

Your Phone Number

**Your Town, VT** – Friday, November 26 [school's name] School hosted its annual Harvest Festival. The school was bustling with excited students and friendly community faces. The lunch time event featured food harvested from local farms, as well as music performed and art made by the students themselves. Students participated in the planning, making and serving of the food, helping to create the menu and cooking alongside Food Service staff. They also decorated the cafeteria with beautifully drawn harvest scenes. A Bountiful Harvest mural, to remain on permanent display outside the cafeteria, was unveiled.

The feast included [enter foods eaten here]. [Grade level] students conducted surveys throughout the feast, and in this way, the Food Service received a bounty of positive feedback about this year's event. [Quote from student or food service worker]

Other activities included [these]. [School's name] School is a [what kind of school] in [town]. This is the [number] year of the Harvest Festival. For more information, please contact [contact information].

**YOUR SCHOOL'S ADDRESS HERE**